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Viewing cable 08SANSALVADOR1139, FMLN VP CANDIDATE SANCHEZ CEREN: HARD-LINER'S SOFT

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Understanding cables

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- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08SANSALVADOR1139	2008-09-26 22:09	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy San Salvador

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.wikileaks.elfaro.net/es/201106/notas/4412/>

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSN #1139/01 2702209
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 262209Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0135
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0349
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0030

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 001139

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/24/2018

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SUBJECT: FMLN VP CANDIDATE SANCHEZ CEREN: HARD-LINER'S SOFT
SELL

Classified By: The Ambassador, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: FMLN VP candidate Salvador Sanchez Ceren told us the (left-wing) FMLN would, if they win the March 2009 elections, reprioritize domestic spending to social needs

like health and education, would maintain CAFTA-DR, and not toy with the dollarized Salvadoran economy at the beginning of their term. (Comment: It is only fair to conclude that an FMLN government will want to reconsider dollarization, and other important questions, after they feel more entrenched in power. End Comment.) He said that while the leading Salvadoran business group was hostile to Mauricio Funes' presidential candidacy, the FMLN had broad acceptance in smaller Salvadoran enterprises. Sanchez Ceren said the large number of Salvadorans in the U.S. would be a powerful incentive to maintain good bilateral ties, but this would not exclude relations with other countries like Cuba or Venezuela. He acknowledged his polarizing role in Salvadoran politics and said El Salvador must look to the future to address El Salvador's problems, not dwell on conflicts of the past. He welcomed recent poll results suggesting Salvadoran voters expect Funes to win the presidential election and expressed concern about possible voting irregularities and post-election violence. He acknowledged the controversy over his relative power vis-a-vis Funes, but said Funes would dominate a "presidentialist" system if he won. End Summary.

12. (C) DCM and PolCouns met with FMLN Vice-Presidential candidate (and head of the FMLN's bloc in the Legislative Assembly) Salvador Sanchez Ceren, his wife Rosa Margarita Villalta de Sanchez, and FMLN Legislative Assembly Deputy Hugo Martinez September 24. Sanchez Ceren said the FMLN intended to refocus GOES investment in the country with increased emphasis on health, education, and agriculture. He said the government's "Red Solidaria" (welfare program) was valuable and should be continued, with a modified focus. He added that there was untapped potential in idle land for expansion of the agricultural sector.

13. (C) Sanchez Ceren then asserted that both the FMLN and presidential candidate Mauricio Funes recognized the need for stability in order to keep and attract investment, both foreign and domestic. He said the FMLN would keep the CAFTA-DR trade agreement and maintain the U.S. Dollar as El Salvador's legal tender. He said that statements in prior campaigns favoring the return of the Colon were no longer applicable, since the country had five years of experience using the Dollar. A return to the Colon would not be possible in the short term, though he did not rule it out. Commenting on recent public disagreements between Funes and others in the FMLN (most recently General Coordinator Medardo Gonzalez), Sanchez Ceren noted power in the Salvadoran system is concentrated in the presidency, thus discounting those differences. Sanchez Ceren said that while the leadership of ANEP, the Salvadoran National Association for Private Enterprise, was hostile to Funes' campaign, they did not represent all Salvadoran business interests. Sanchez Ceren and Martinez said the Funes campaign and the FMLN had ongoing contact with many smaller businesses that were not members of ANEP and that were supporting the campaign and prepared to work with a Funes government.

14. (C) Sanchez Ceren noted the large number of Salvadoran citizens living in the United States, suggesting this was a powerful reason for the FMLN to maintain close relations with the United States. Sanchez Ceren and Martinez welcomed the announcement that Temporary Protected Status for Salvadorans in the U.S. had been extended. Sanchez Ceren said FMLN foreign policy would be broadly based on principles of good relations with other countries (including Cuba and Venezuela) and honoring commitments. Using the country's trade agreements and dollarized economy as an example, he said that would be the starting point for policy decisions, suggesting these agreements will remain in place even if certain aspects of CAFTA-DR would need to be renegotiated. He suggested it would be folly to discard the advances El Salvador has made since the 1992 peace accords. Martinez noted that there are many who selectively doubt the FMLN's policy assertions, acknowledging the certainty of an Iraq pullout, but dismiss other promises that cannot be demonized. "We will keep our promises," he said.

15. (C) Sanchez Ceren acknowledged he is a polarizing figure

in Salvadoran politics. Given the country's history, he said, that should not surprise anyone. He said the solution to resolving this polarization was to look forward, not back, and for Salvadoran political parties to set aside historical battles and address the country's current needs. Sanchez Ceren and Martinez welcomed poll results from the Francisco Gavidia University which showed respondents expect Funes to win the election over Avila by 16.6 percent (47.8 Funes, 31.2 Avila, with 19.7 percent either not responding or saying they don't know.) (Note: The question did not address voting intentions. End Note.) They acknowledged that the poll that matters will be held March 15 and expressed worries about potential voting fraud and post-election violence in the event of a close result. They welcomed planned monitoring missions by the European Union, OAS, and others, and were supportive of the NDI-led comprehensive monitoring and quick count program.

16. (C) Pressed on his views towards Cuba, Sanchez Ceren noted that, because of the assistance provided to rebel forces during the war, including efforts to secure a peace agreement, he had a special appreciation for Cuba and the Cuban government. He said he welcomed recent changes taking place in Cuba and said the FMLN would establish relations with Havana if it wins the election. Martinez noted El Salvador was the only Central American country without bilateral relations with Cuba. DCM noted that some countries

(e.g. Chile, Brazil, and Panama) had managed to maintain good relations with the United States and Havana, but others, such as Bolivia, had been unable to strike the right balance.

17. (C) Comment: Sanchez Ceren was, as expected, following the script regarding positions on the FMLN's continued good relations with the U.S. if Funes wins. In areas where we are likely to disagree (e.g., Cuba) his acknowledgment of those differences was direct. We are struck by the irony of Sanchez Ceren commenting on the need for tolerance at the end of a week where media featured his having ordered summary executions of accused infiltrators during the civil war. It is still an open question whether he or Funes calls the FMLN shots. Econ Counselor reported separately that he was with other FMLN members the same day who were using the talking point regarding the GOES being a "presidentialist" system. Finally, Sanchez Ceren saying what the FMLN will not do at the beginning of their term, e.g., ending dollarization, leads us to conclude that dollarization, and much more, probably would be on the table later on.

GLAZER

=====CABLE ENDS=====